A Midsummer Night’s Dream is one of William Shakespeare’s most popular works. The story mainly talks about three groups of people: the Athenians, fairies and a group of actors who were planning a performance to work on stage. The story begins with the Athenians who had problems arranging their marriage, but later on with the help of the fairies they finally had a happy ending, though some amusing mistakes were made during the process. The fairy king and fairy queen also encountered some quarrels, and the fairy king sent his servant to play some tricks to the queen to make her fall in love with one of the actors whose head was turned into a donkey head by the magic of the fairy king. In the end, they all went back with their lovers and had a happy ending, and they call this adventure “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”.

No one knows exactly when he finished writing A Midsummer Night’s Dream, but some people believed that it was written between 1590 and 1597. One of the hypotheses is that William Shakespeare wrote this play based on the reference and allusion to Edmund Spenser’s Epithalamion. The ode was mainly about a wedding, and it was usually dated back to 1595 early 1596. Another assumption that this play was written in this time period is that some people suggested that it was written for the Queen to celebrate the feast day of St. John. After the play was finished, it was first performed in the Globe Theatre in London, which was built in 1599 by Shakespeare’s playing company. Also, it was played in The Theatre which was an Elizabethan playhouse in Shoreditch, an outskirt of London.

The historical background of A Midsummer Night’s Dream was in Elizabethan time. People named it as the golden age in English history. It represented the apogee of the English Renaissance and saw the flowering of poetry, music and literature. In this time, English has a centralized, well-organized and effective government. The society was stable and free for people to develop creative work. Simultaneously, the economy began to benefit greatly from the new era of transatlantic trade. When the economy is prosperous, literary work would be able to have better development. William Shakespeare was the representative of the golden age in the English history.

To apply to what we learn this semester to Shakespeare’s work, I did some survey and figured out two examples of vowel change and also provided the multimedia. From Henry IV, Part One, 2.4.246-42, Falstaff,”What, upon compulsion? Zounds, and I were at the strappado or all the racks in the world, I would not tell you upon compulsion. Give you a reason on compulsion? If reasons were as plentiful as blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon compulsion, I.” Here, the word reason was pronounced as the word “raisin” because of vowel change in the Elizabethan time. Shakespeare used it as a pun to expand the meaning of a word. Further, I the usage of thou, ye, you has changed in Shakespeare’s time. In the language of Shakespeare's time, the distinction between subject and object uses of ye and you gradually disappeared, and you became the norm in all grammatical functions and social situations. Ye continued in use, but by the end of the 16th century it was restricted to archaic, religious, or literary contexts. By 1700, the thou forms were also largely restricted in this way. Lastly, I found out some special pronunciation that is different from now in Shakespeare’s time.

To conclude, Shakespeare is credited by the Oxford English Dictionary with the introduction of nearly 3,000 words into the language. He uses language with facility and power, but with a colloquial freedom as well. Until now, after four hundred years, there are still some words that are being discussed and unexplained. In the words of Louis Marder, "Shakespeare was so facile in employing words that he was able to use over 7,000 of them—more than occur in the whole King James version of the Bible—only once and never again." After learning the history of English this semester, I think it is very important to also apply what I learn to other literary work. Thus, reading Shakespeare is a good way to understand and find examples of the history of English better.